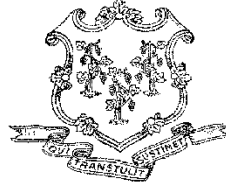


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Good morning Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg and members of the Public Health Committee. I would like to express my support for HB 6550 AN ACT CONCERNING THE OFFICE OF HEALTH STRATEGY'S RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO COMMUNITY BENEFITS PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED BY HOSPITALS. This legislation would encourage the use of hospital community benefit plans to address racial and ethnic health disparities and facilitate the integration of the community benefits plans with the actual needs of the community.

Under federal law, not for profit hospitals, in order to maintain their not for profit status, must provide community benefit programs that address community needs. Hospitals must have written financial assistance policies and they must conduct community needs assessments at least every three years. The federal law creates a floor but our state can and should require more.

While providing financial assistance is an important part of hospital community benefits programs, it is clear that there are other types of assistance that hospitals should provide. This includes addressing social determinants of health such that residents can avoid hospitalization and addressing disparities in health care. For example, some hospitals have included housing programs so that residents can move into safe and clean housing that is free of mold and other irritants which often can lead to hospitalizations for asthma patients. Community benefits programs should include measures to keep people healthy as well as policies that assist people with covering the cost of the care that is needed.

The Covid pandemic has shined a bright light on the tragic effects of racial and ethnic disparities in health care. This problem is not new, but the pandemic exacerbated the disparity and put it front and center for all of us to see every day. Community benefits programs can and should address racial and ethnic health disparities. HB 6550 would amend the Connecticut statutes to require that hospital community benefits programs address racial and ethnic disparities. The bill would also create consistent community benefits reporting requirements which would allow for a clearer picture of how Connecticut's hospitals serve their communities.

Thank you for raising this important bill